

HIGHLIGHTS NEEDLES FIELD OFFICE

California Desert District Advisory Council Meeting

June 18 - 19, 2010

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Projects

Recreation ARRA

BLM Action: The Needles Field Office (NFO) has two recreation projects that were funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA): Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark Access Road Paving, and the Turtle Mountains Wilderness, Mexican Hat Trail and Trailhead project.

Contact: Mike Ahrens, Recreation and Wilderness Branch Chief
Mona Daniels, Wilderness Specialist

Status: Amboy Access Road Paving

The contract for paving of the Amboy Recreation Area Access Road was awarded to KC Equipment Inc, out of El Cajon, CA. Construction will begin on June 14, 2010 and will likely be complete by the time this report is given. As the project came in under budget, a seal coat was added to reduce the need for that in the first year of service.

Turtle Mountains, Mexican Hat Trail and Trailhead

Eleven abandoned mine site have been abated through various methods including backfill, foam plugging, gates, and cupolas. The trailhead for the Mexican Hat Trail has been constructed along with two primitive campsites including shade structures, picnic table, tent pad, and fire pit. A contract has been let with Student Conservation Association (SCA) to provide a trail crew to delineate the hiking trail and campsite areas, and to restore disturbed areas adjacent to the trailhead and campsites.

Resource Protection ARRA

BLM Action: Funding was provided for projects to protect springs and associated riparian habitats and features located in the Kingston Mountains, specifically within the Horse Thief Spring Grazing Allotment. Substantial six-strand wire fences were constructed in April 2010 outside the perimeters of Horse Thief Spring, Crystal Spring, and Wild Horse Spring to prevent intrusions from cattle and resultant habitat degradations.

Contacts: Rodney J. Mouton, Multi-Resources Branch Chief
Everett Bartz, Rangeland Management Specialist

Status: The exclosure fences were constructed in April 2010. A cattleguard was moved to a

more strategic location and debris removal was completed. Two iron swing gates were installed along a secondary road where concern over important cultural resources prevented timely installation of cattleguards. Project debris removal was contracted and two 40-yard dumpsters were filled during the week of June 7th, with the dumpsters to be removed from the site on June 16th to complete the project.

Signing Program

BLM Action: The NFO is developing a system of signs to provide directional, regulatory, and interpretive messages to the public within our jurisdiction. The signs will be consistent with the NFO Interpretive Prospectus and appropriate BLM Sign Standards.

Contacts: David Roan, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Murl Shaver, Public Contact Specialist

Status: The Needles route signing program suffered some setbacks this year. One of the two seasonal park rangers brought on to accomplish the signing left only two months into the system. The vehicle (Jeep Rubicon) which we hoped to use to access the remote routes has only just arrived, and we were unable to bring on the proposed trail crews, due to some agency wide problems obligating OHV funds. Still, much has been accomplished. Much of the Piute Valley (north of I40 and between the Mojave Preserve and the Dead Mountains Wilderness) has been signed, along with much of the Ward Valley (south of the I40 to about the Turtle Mountains Wilderness). Additionally, much of the signing accomplished last year has been monitored and maintained as necessary, and several trouble spots were identified and signed.

Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System

BLM Action: Solar Partners', LLC has submitted applications to the Needles Field Office for development of the proposed Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System (ISEGS), a concentrated solar electrical generating facility capable of generating 400 megawatts (MW) of renewable power. The project would be located in Ivanpah Valley, southwest of Primm, Nevada.

The proposed project would be constructed in three phases as follows, Ivanpah 1, Ivanpah 2 and Ivanpah 3. Shared facilities, including a substation, would be constructed in the first phase. The three independent solar thermal electric generating facilities (or plants) and shared substation would be co-located on approximately 4,000 acres of federal land managed by the BLM. Ivanpah 1 and 2 would both be 100-MW plants with heliostat arrays consisting of up to 55,000 heliostats. Ivanpah 3 would be a 200-MW plant having heliostat arrays consisting of up to 104,000 heliostats. Each heliostat would consist of two mirrors mounted on a single pylon, along with a computer-programmed aiming control system that directs the motion of the heliostat to track the movement of the sun. Each of the three proposed plants would have an individual power block with steam turbine, an air-cooled condenser, switchyard, and a generation tie-line.

Contacts: Tom Hurshman, Project Manager
George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office - lead
BLM, Las Vegas Field Office

Status: On November 6, 2009, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the California Energy Commission (CEC) released a Final Staff Assessment (FSA) for the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation Project. The public comment period closed on February 11, 2010.

A BLM Notice of Availability of a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Ivanpah Solar Electric Generation System Project (SDEIS) was published in the Federal Register on April 16, 2010. The public comment period for the SDEIS concluded June 1, 2010.

Eldorado-Ivanpah Transmission Project

BLM Action: Southern California Edison has submitted a right-of-way application to construct and operate the proposed Eldorado-Ivanpah Transmission Project (EITP) located in Ivanpah Valley, southwest of Primm, Nevada. The EITP would consist of replacing an existing 115kV transmission line with a new double circuit 230kV electric transmission line, building a new Ivanpah substation, and building new fiber optics telecommunications facilities.

The proposed transmission line would handle projected electricity produced from 14 renewable energy project proposals in and around the Ivanpah and Eldorado Valleys, including the Ivanpah Solar Energy Generation System planned by Solar Partners, LLC. The proposed electric transmission line and a new substation would be constructed within an existing designated utility corridor.

Contacts: Tom Hurshman, Project Manager
George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office - lead

Status: A Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report for the Southern California Edison Eldorado-Ivanpah Transmission Project; California, Nevada was published in the Federal Register on May 7, 2009. BLM and the California Public Utilities Commission conducted two public comment meetings for the project on May 26, 2010. The DEIS/DEIR 45-day public comment period will conclude on June 21, 2010.

I-15 Joint Point of Entry

BLM Action: The state of California has submitted a Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) Act lease application to construct and operate the proposed Joint Port of Entry (JPOE) on I-15 located in Ivanpah Valley, southwest of Primm, Nevada. The JPOE would include an Agricultural Inspection Facility and a Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Facility. Upon completion of the project, all traffic entering California on the southbound I-15 would be diverted through the JPOE.

Contact: George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator

Agencies BLM, Needles Field Office – lead
Caltrans - roads and traffic control
California Department of Food and Agriculture - agricultural inspection facility
California Department of General Services - state facilities administration
California Highway Patrol (CHP) - commercial vehicle enforcement facility

Status: A Notice of Proposed Realty Action was published in the Federal Register on February 10, 2010 addressing the site's suitability for classification for lease and subsequent conveyance under the provisions of the R&PP Act. Notification of the NORA was also published for three successive weeks in the local newspaper. No comments were received regarding the suitability of the land for a Joint Port of Entry inspection facility.

Grazing Lease Renewal

BLM Action: The Needles Field Office is in the process of developing grazing decisions for a total of ten cattle grazing allotments. Of these five are proposed to be renewed, and five are to be considered for relinquishment.

Contact: Everett Bartz, Rangeland Management Specialist

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office

Status: The Needles Field Office has issued grazing decisions for the renewal of grazing activities on four allotments; Lazy Daisy, Jean Lake, Clark Mountain, and Crescent Peak. The environmental assessment for the fifth proposed renewal decision (Horsethief Springs) is approaching completion with a September 30 target date.

Abandoned Mine Lands

BLM Action: The Needles Field Office is very actively pursuing inventories, prioritization and closures of abandoned mines that can present a public safety hazard.

Agencies: BLM, Needles Field Office with support from the California Desert District and California Department of Conservation

Contact: Rodney Mouton, Multi-Resources Branch Chief

Status: During the past three months, NFO has worked with the CDD AML coordinator, the California Department of Conservation and contracted AML hazard remediation specialists to complete the closure of several unnamed mine features in the eastern Sacramento Mountains.

Environmental reviews are reaching completion to allow for the closure of 4 shafts and adits at the Vulcan Mine in the Ship Mountains. This work is expected to be contracted prior to the end of the Fiscal Year.

Two bat gates were constructed at occupied adits in the eastern Sacramento Mountains and two shafts were backfilled. Additional cupolas, backfills, and gates are scheduled to take place after September 15, after biological concerns can be addressed.

As previously mentioned, AML funds were used to address physical safety hazards at ten abandoned mine features using various methods in association with the Mexican Hat project in the Turtle Mountains.

In April 2010, two cupolas were installed and debris removal conducted at the Copper Butte Mine.

A volunteer crew has inventoried about 25 additional mine features in the northern and western Sacramento Mountains and the NFO is working on the environmental documentation to allow us to take care of the physical safety hazards there.

Environmental review has been finalized for four shafts at the Lane Dog Mine with the safety hazard work currently being contracted by the California Department of Conservation for closures after September 15.

Wind Energy Projects

BLM Action: The Needles Field Office is processing applications for proposed wind energy projects.

Contact: Rodney Mouton, Resources Branch Chief

Status: NFO has completed environmental reviews and issued decisions authorizing the installation of meteorological stations for the Oak Creek Wind Energy project south of Ludlow, CA, and for Padoma Wind, LLC on the western slopes of the Sacramento Mountains.

Letters have been sent to several applicants of proposed wind projects citing that they must meet due diligence requirements in furthering their projects or that their applications will be subject to cancellation.